

## The Port of Livorno and its *Nazione Ebraica* in the Eighteenth Century: Economic Utility and Political Reforms\*

by Francesca Bregoli

### Abstract

*The port of Livorno in Tuscany was a successful example of mercantilist policy at work, from which its Jewish community reaped great benefits in the early modern period: Jews were granted special prerogatives on the grounds of their economic usefulness, gaining liberties precluded to most Jewish communities elsewhere. However, these economic privileges had conservative implications as well. In this essay, I argue that, at the onset of “modernity,” the exceptional nature and economic system of Livorno, together with the long-standing conception of Livornese Jews as commercially useful, contributed to the preservation of traditional structures and norms and prevented the full application of enlightened equalizing policies championed by the Tuscan government. Instead of furthering political integration, the deeply engrained “discourse of Jewish utility” encouraged the permanence of a widespread view of the Jews as an autonomous corporate collectivity protected by the continued benevolence of the sovereign. The article includes a comparison of the Tuscan situation with the better-known French and Prussian cases.*

“The Jews of Livorno live together in peace and safety in fine homes among the nobles of the land. Their houses are made of stone; most of its people are merchants and notables. Most of them shave their beards and style their hair, and there is no difference between their clothes and those of the rest of the people. They speak the common language correctly and fluently, like one of their orators... They dwell peacefully and quietly, and pursue every occupation and business they desire. My heart gladdens and I am proud to see my brothers living securely in the midst of their [gentile] neighbors, without enemy or troublemaker.”

With these words Isaac Euchel (1758-1804), one of the leaders of the Prussian *Haskalah* (the Jewish Enlightenment), described the Jews of Livorno in a fictional travelogue published in the journal *Ha-Me’asef* in 1790.<sup>1</sup> In Euchel’s depiction, Livorno was above all a place of freedom

---

\* Portions of this essay expand on material previously published in Francesca Bregoli, ““Two Jews Walk into a Coffeehouse”: The “Jewish Question,” Utility, and Political Participation in Late Eighteenth-Century Livorno”, *Jewish History* 24 (2010): 309-329, 317-323. I am grateful to Omri Elisha, Cristiana Facchini and an anonymous reader for their helpful comments and suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> Isaac Euchel, “Igerot meshullam ben uriyah ha-eshtemo‘i” (Letters of Meshullam son

and opportunities, where Jews and gentiles coexisted peacefully as Livornese Jewry fulfilled its social potential in the pursuit of useful occupations and businesses. This image provided a symbolic model for the Prussian Jewish modernizers: Livornese Jews represented the ideal balance between Jewishness and openness to the outside world, between Hebrew learning and European culture, between religious independence and full civil integration that the *Haskalah* strove to promote among Prussian Jews.<sup>2</sup>

Although Livornese Jewry, also commonly referred to as *nazione ebrea*,<sup>3</sup> came to represent the prototypical “modern” Jews in *maskilic* ideology thanks to its unprecedented privileges and apparent integration, in reality its status as a partially outsider society did not change until well into the nineteenth century. In this article I will argue that the exceptional nature and economic system of Livorno, a bustling port on the Tyrrhenian coast of Tuscany, together with the long-standing conception of Livornese Jews as commercially useful and economically successful ensured a protracted understanding of this community as an autonomous corporate body, a factor that impeded the full application in Livorno of the enlightened project of communal reforms championed by the Tuscan government.

### The Tuscan State and Livornese Jews: A Fruitful Symbiosis

The history of Livornese Jewry and its political and institutional development are closely connected with transformations of the early modern Tuscan state and the growth of its Mediterranean maritime trade. The Medici family ruling over Tuscany actively promoted and pursued the establishment of a Jewish community in Livorno at the end of the sixteenth century as an integral part of the Tuscan state’s strategy of expansion.<sup>4</sup> The development of this Jewish community, therefore, ought to be studied in conjunction with the refashioning of the port of Livorno itself.<sup>5</sup>

---

of Uriyah the Ashtmoite), *Ha-Me’asef* 6 (1790): 171-176, 245-249.

<sup>2</sup> On the image of Italian Jews in the *maskilic* imagination, see Lois Dubin, “Trieste and Berlin; the Italian role in the cultural politics of the *Haskalah*,” in *Toward Modernity. The European Jewish Model*, ed. Jacob Katz, (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1987), 189-224.

<sup>3</sup> This definition had nothing to do with modern meanings of “nation,” but rather referred to a corporate body of people, defined by specific characteristics and legally included within the early modern state. The notion was not unique to Livornese Jews (in Bordeaux for instance, the Sephardi community referred to itself as *la nation*) and the term was also applied to other merchant groups living in the Tuscan port, such as the English and the French. See below note 20.

<sup>4</sup> Furio Diaz, *Il Granducato di Toscana. I Medici*, (Turin: UTET, 1976), 188-191.

<sup>5</sup> On the development of the port of Livorno during the seventeenth and eighteenth century see the classic works by Mario Baruchello, *Livorno e il suo porto. Origini*,

The founding document of the productive synergy between Livornese Jewry and early modern Tuscany is a charter, later known as *Livornina* (1591), that was promulgated by the Grand Duke of Tuscany Ferdinand I de' Medici (ruled 1587-1609). The edict, reissued with slight changes in 1593 and routinely confirmed from then on, granted generous privileges to foreign merchants who settled in the port of Livorno.<sup>6</sup> Formally directed to “merchants of any nation, Levantine, Ponentine, Spanish, Portuguese, Greek, German and Italian, Jewish, Turkish, Moorish, Armenian, Persian and others,”<sup>7</sup> this charter was however intended to attract primarily *conversos* (that is, Jews who had been baptized in the Iberian Peninsula and their descendents) and Jews of Iberian and Levantine origin, a population reputed to be accomplished merchants, endowed with large capital, and part of well-established trading networks both within the Mediterranean basin and outside of it.<sup>8</sup>

Among other privileges, the *Livornina* granted relative protection from the Holy Office to former *conversos*, bestowed on Livornese Jews the status of Tuscan subjects, provided them with economic incentives, exempted them from wearing distinguishing signs, allowed them to buy real estate, and granted the Jewish community significant jurisdictional autonomy in both civil and criminal (for lower level charges) cases.<sup>9</sup> In many respects, Livorno proved unique, inasmuch as Jews in the rest of Italy were segregated to ghettos, forced to wear identifying signs, and barred from owning property for most of the early modern period.

The establishment of the Livornese *nazione ebrea*, it should be remembered, was a specific instance of a much broader historical phenomenon that took place between approximately 1530 and 1650, namely the return of Sephardi Jews to Western Europe and their arrival to the New World, attracted by state authorities with generous charters because of their reputed commercial usefulness.<sup>10</sup> Other Italian

*caratteristiche e vicende dei traffici livornesi*, (Livorno: Soc. An. Ed. Riviste Tecniche, 1932); Fernand Braudel and Ruggiero Romano, *Navires et marchandises à l'entrée du port de Livourne* (1547-1611), (Paris: A. Colin, 1951); Guido Sonnino, *Saggio sulle Industrie, Marina e Commercio sotto i primi due Lorenesi (1737-1790)*, (Cortona: E. Alari, 1909).

<sup>6</sup> Renzo Toaff, *La Nazione Ebraica a Livorno e a Pisa (1591-1700)*, (Florence: Olschki, 1990), 41-51 (see *ibid.*, 419-435 for the complete text of the 1591 and 1593 charters); Attilio Milano, “La Costituzione Livornina del 1593”, *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 34 (1968): 394-410; Bernard Cooperman, *Trade and Settlement: The Establishment and Early Development of the Jewish Communities in Leghorn and Pisa (1591-1626)*, Unpublished PhD Thesis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1976), 248-378.

<sup>7</sup> Toaff, *La Nazione Ebraica*, 419.

<sup>8</sup> Lucia Frattarelli Fischer, “Reti toscane e reti internazionali degli ebrei di Livorno nel Seicento”, *Zakhor* 6 (2003): 93-116

<sup>9</sup> Toaff, *La Nazione Ebraica*, 421-422, 427, 428; Cooperman, *Trade and Settlement*, 341-342.

<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Israel, *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism, 1550-1750*, (Portland, OR: Littman, 1998); Jonathan Karp, *The Politics of Jewish Commerce. Economic Thought and Emancipation in Europe, 1638-1848*, (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University

principalities granted privileges to Iberian and Ottoman Jews and New Christians before the Tuscan state did. Papal Ancona offered charters to Jews in 1534, Ferrara attracted Jews and *conversos* in 1538, Tuscany invited Portuguese New Christians and Jews to settle in Pisa and Florence in 1548 and 1551, Savoy welcomed Jews to settle in the port of Nice in 1572 (this edict was however short lived), and Venice extended generous charters to Ottoman Jews and Iberian New Christians in 1589.<sup>11</sup> Although the Medici were not alone in vying for the attention of Sephardi merchants,<sup>12</sup> thanks to the generosity of the *Livornina* and the subsequent flourishing and demographic growth of the community, Livorno came to exemplify a particularly extraordinary “success story” of Jewish readmission in the eyes of both Jewish and non-Jewish observers. If the unprecedented liberties that the *Livornina* provided to Jews and former *conversos* rendered Livorno an emblematic center for Jewish life in Western Europe, Livorno’s exceptionality had not started in 1591. Since its very inception as a city, Livorno’s urban structure and model of governance were radically new in comparison with the rest of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany.<sup>13</sup> Livorno’s commercial activity also clearly separated it from the rest of the Tuscan state, which based its livelihood on manufacture and agriculture.

This originally small and insalubrious fortified village (Porto Pisano) had served as Pisa’s harbor up to 1421, when the Florentine republic absorbed it. In 1575, Grand Duke Francesco I de’ Medici entrusted architect Bernardo Buontalenti with a revolutionary project to design an entirely new city over the grounds of the original port, according to an efficient (though ultimately constraining and somewhat artificial) urban plan.<sup>14</sup> Its strategic position on the Tyrrhenian Sea put Livorno at an advantage vis-à-vis other centers on the Adriatic, such as Venice and

---

Press, 2008), 12-16.

<sup>11</sup> Benjamin Ravid, “A Tale of Three Cities and Their “Raison d’État:” Ancona, Venice, Livorno, and the Competition for Jewish Merchants in the Sixteenth Century”, *Mediterranean Historical Review* 6 (1991): 138-162; Renata Segre, “Sephardic Settlements in Sixteenth-Century Italy: A Historical and Geographical Survey”, *Mediterranean Historical Review* 6 (1991): 112-137.

<sup>12</sup> Among the rich bibliography on Sephardi Jews in sixteenth-century Italy, see the recent important additions by Aron di Leone Leoni, *La nazione ebraica spagnola e portoghese di Ferrara (1492-1559): i suoi rapporti col governo ducale e la popolazione locale ed i suoi legami con le Nazioni Portoghesi di Ancona, Pesaro e Venezia*, 2 vols. (Florence: Olschki, 2011) and Federica Ruspio, *La nazione portoghese. Ebrei ponentini e nuovi cristiani a Venezia*, (Turin: Silvio Zamorani editore, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> Samuel Fettah, “Livourne: cité du Prince, cité marchande (XVIe-XIXe siècle)” in *Florence et la Toscane XIV<sup>e</sup>-XIX<sup>e</sup> siècles. Les dynamiques d’un État italien*, eds. Jean Boutier, Sandro Landi, Olivier Rouchen, (Rennes: PUR, 2004), 179-195: 182.

<sup>14</sup> Diaz, *I Medici*, 259-260; Id., “Prolusione”, *Atti del Convegno “Livorno e il Mediterraneo”*, 15-23: 16. See also Paolo Castignoli, “Livorno da terra murata a città”, in *Atti del Convegno “Livorno e il Mediterraneo”*, 32-39.

Ancona, because it was more convenient for ships coming into the Mediterranean from Atlantic ports to sail to the Tuscan coast rather than circumnavigate the entire Italian Peninsula.<sup>15</sup> The Medicis were determined to take advantage of this geographical opportunity. Thus, unlike ancient and medieval towns, the Tuscan government first planned the urban unit of Livorno, and only later shaped its social texture by promoting specific economic and social policies that would attract a work force and international traders.<sup>16</sup>

Because Livorno did not have a glorious past as an independent *comune* (city-state), as did other towns acquired by the Tuscan state during the early modern period, it was more easily molded into an emblem of the power and aspirations of the Medici administration.<sup>17</sup> The *Livornina* stemmed from the same governmental will to confer a privileged status on this Tuscan city, in order to increase the state's economic potential by creating a maritime trade center. The declaration of the port's neutrality in 1646 and the 1676 edict that turned Livorno into a free port reflected a similar impulse.<sup>18</sup>

The uniqueness of the port determined the city's exceptional demographic composition and institutional structures. Unlike the rest of Tuscany, Livorno's population was mostly made up of immigrants, including members of religious minorities that were unwelcome in the rest of Catholic Europe, alongside debtors, outlaws with a criminal past, and hopeful youth looking for bright economic prospects. Initially, the bulk of the immigration comprised petty merchants and craftsmen from central Italian regions and the Tyrrhenian basin (Genoa, Corsica, and Provence). When the activity of the port took off in the course of the seventeenth century, increasing numbers of international traders from the Levant and North West Europe settled in the city, contributing to its cosmopolitan character.<sup>19</sup>

It was mainly foreign groups commonly known as *nazioni* (lit. "nations," a term used in its medieval meaning to refer to colonies of international merchants) organized along corporate lines and enjoying consular representation, that handled international and internal commerce in Livorno.<sup>20</sup> Among them, the *nazione ebrea* soon became the largest and

---

<sup>15</sup> Ravid, "A Tale of Three Cities", 155-156.

<sup>16</sup> Giancarlo Nuti, "Livorno, il porto e la città nell'epoca medicea", in *Atti del Convegno "Livorno e il Mediterraneo"*, 325-346.

<sup>17</sup> Diaz, "Prolusione", 15-23; Fettah, "Livourne", 179-180.

<sup>18</sup> Diaz, *I Medici*, 301-303, 395-398.

<sup>19</sup> Elena Fasano Guarini, "Esenzioni e immigrazione a Livorno tra sedicesimo e diciassettesimo secolo", in *Atti del Convegno "Livorno e il Mediterraneo"*, 56-76. On the role of the city in the early modern Mediterranean basin, see *Mediterranean Urban Culture, 1400-1700*, ed. Alexander Cowan, (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000).

<sup>20</sup> Carlo Mangio, "Nazioni e tolleranza a Livorno," *Nuovi Studi Livornesi* 3 (1995), 11-22: 12, notes the ambiguity of the term "nation" in the Livornese context. Some

most influential ethnic-religious minority in the port.<sup>21</sup> The favorable conditions set by the *Livornina* encouraged the demographic, economic, and cultural flourishing of Livornese Jewry. The Jewish population of the Tuscan port increased exponentially in the first half of the seventeenth century (from 134 individuals in 1601 to 1250 in 1645).<sup>22</sup> Thanks to its continuous growth, by the mid eighteenth century Livornese Jewry became the second largest Jewish community in Western Europe, after that of Amsterdam, numbering almost 5000 souls by the Napoleonic period.<sup>23</sup> The port counted a percentage of Jewish inhabitants (between 9-12% of the entire population) perhaps unequalled in any other urban center in Western Europe throughout the early modern period.<sup>24</sup> Unlike any of the other foreign corporate groups that resided in Livorno, the *nazione ebrea* was legally recognized as a “subject nation” by the Tuscan authorities because of its economic merits. Its members were legally recognized as Tuscan subjects, and the community enjoyed the right to organize itself as a special political body, autonomous yet dependent on the government of the city.<sup>25</sup> Over time, the Jewish community's governing structures were integrated into the bureaucratic machinery of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. In 1715, Cosimo III de’

---

documents refer with this terminology to the *negozianti* (the wealthiest international traders) belonging to all the foreign corporate groups living in Livorno. Others only include English, Dutch and French *negozianti*, alongside the *nazione ebrea*.

<sup>21</sup> Although technically, in *ius commune*, a Jewish community could not be invested as a corporation, in practice in many areas of early modern Europe the Jews were regarded as forming a corporate body accepted within a hierarchical society of estates. *De facto*, the Livornese Jewish community too functioned as a corporate body. I am grateful to Kenneth Stow for pointing out this distinction to me.

<sup>22</sup> Toaff, *La Nazione Ebraica*, 63, 121.

<sup>23</sup> Jean Pierre Filippini, “La nazione ebrea di Livorno”, in *Storia d'Italia. Annali 11. Gli ebrei in Italia*, vol. 2, *Dall'emancipazione a oggi*, ed. Corrado Vivanti, (Turin: Einaudi, 1997), 1047-1066: 1054; census statistics compiled between 1737 and 1790 show that Jewish population of the port numbered 3476 souls in 1738, 3687 in 1758 and 4327 in 1784. The Jewish community of Amsterdam, which counted approximately 17,000 individuals by 1750 (including both Sephardim and Ashkenazim) was the largest in Western Europe (Israel, *European Jewry*, 198). The Sephardi communities of Bayonne and Bordeaux were both smaller than that of Livorno, counting respectively about 3500 and 3000 individuals, while the communities of Venice and Rome numbered approximately 2000 individuals each during the eighteenth century.

<sup>24</sup> On the history of Livornese Jewry in the eighteenth century see Jean Pierre Filippini, *Il porto di Livorno e la Toscana (1676-1814)*, 3 vols. (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1998); Francesca Trivellato, “The Port Jews of Livorno and their Global Networks of Trade in the Early Modern Period”, *Jewish Culture and History* 7 (2004): 31-48, and ead., *The Familiarity of Strangers. The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). For a social history of the community in the seventeenth century, see now also Lucia Frattarelli Fischer, *Vivere fuori dal Ghetto. Ebrei a Pisa e Livorno (secoli XVI-XVIII)*, (Turin: Silvio Zamorani editore, 2008).

<sup>25</sup> Toaff, *La Nazione Ebraica*, 47; Mangio, “‘Nazioni’ e tolleranza”, 12.

Medici advocated to himself the right to select the lay leaders of the Jewish community as well as other governing figures, from a list of designated names submitted by the governing board of the *nazione ebrea*. This decision, stemming from the hope that stable Jewish administration would foster the commercial potential of the port, benefited the city's Sephardi oligarchy and ensured a protracted status quo, which laid the foundation for a convergence of political goals shared by both the Grand Duchy and the Sephardi oligarchy itself. Initially composed of Iberian and Levantine Sephardim, over time the community had absorbed a steady flow of immigrants from other Italian centers, as well as from North Africa. Despite the significant transformations in the demographic composition of the *nazione ebrea*, however, the old Sephardi mercantile elite retained political control until the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>26</sup>

While the vast majority of Livornese Jewry were earning low wages or living in poverty, as was the case in any sizable early modern Jewish community, a small but visible group of wealthy *negozianti* (international merchants) came to represent the commercial success of the entire *nazione ebrea*. And commerce did indeed feature prominently among the activities pursued by Livornese Jews. About 42% of them were employed in professions related to aspects of international and local trade: this included not only actual traders, cashiers, financial intermediaries, and interpreters, but also storage, packing and shipping professionals, and porters. Another 23% of the active Jewish population supplied essential services to the community, working as petty merchants, grocers, tailors, printers, or second-hand clothes retailers, while about 6% of Livornese Jews depended directly on the community, from which they received a salary: this latest group included rabbis, preachers, teachers, and public health care professionals.<sup>27</sup>

Thanks to the economic policies of the Medici house, Livorno thrived, and Livornese Jewish merchants played a key role in Mediterranean trade throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By the middle of the seventeenth century, at the end of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), the port had emerged as the chief Dutch and English commercial hub in the Mediterranean and one of the most important centers for the distribution of wares from Northern Europe and the American colonies to the Maghreb and the Ottoman Empire, and from the Levant to Amsterdam or London. Despite the increasing prominence of Atlantic trade for world markets in the course of the eighteenth century, a high proportion of Dutch and English Mediterranean commerce continued to pass through the port of Livorno. The chief agents of the resale of these goods in North Africa and the Levant were Sephardi merchants based in

---

<sup>26</sup> Toaff, *La Nazione Ebraica*, 178, 180-182.

<sup>27</sup> Filippini, "La nazione ebrea", 1057-1058.

Livorno.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the Mediterranean region retained global relevance particularly for the exchange of Tyrrhenian coral and Indian diamonds. Livornese Sephardi firms dominated the commerce of these luxury goods, which led them to create trade networks with both Jews and non-Jews in the Ottoman Empire, Portugal, and as far away as the Indian subcontinent.<sup>29</sup>

### The Economic Utility of Livornese Jewry

As we have seen, the perceived usefulness of Jewish merchants was the reason why the Medici government had invited former *conversos* and Levantine Jews to settle in Livorno and granted them extensive privileges in 1591-93, in the hope that their presence would boost the port's economy. Jonathan Karp has persuasively argued that, starting in the 1630s, the wider process of Jewish readmission to Western Europe also functioned as a catalyst for moralists and philosophers to begin re-examining "virtues and defects" of the Jews in light of new economic theories and realities. Since Jews were usually invited to settle precisely because of their perceived positive economic role, "their place within the host societies came to be redefined in light of existing and ongoing debates over the political relevance of new economic phenomena."<sup>30</sup> As these debates evolved with the emergence of new economic theories over the course of the following two centuries, the changing discourses on "Jewish commerce" and Jewish status serve as a litmus test to assess not only the complexity of attitudes toward the Jewish presence in Western Europe, but more generally European approaches to commerce itself.<sup>31</sup> Considering the nature of the Livornese port, how did the perception of Jewish commercial utility evolve in Tuscany, as Medicean mercantilism came under criticism and different economic doctrines animated by free trade and physiocratic principles gained popularity? After the house of Lorraine replaced the Medici dynasty in 1737, the governmental belief in the *nazione ebrea's* usefulness did not diminish, although the special status of the city did indeed become the object of critical reconsideration in light of the physiocratic ideas informing the reformist will of the Lorraine rulers.<sup>32</sup> At this delicate dynastic passage, the new administration came to associate the alterity of Livorno, its special privileges, and its exclusively commercial nature with the decline of the Medici house, its administrative shortcomings, and the perceived

---

<sup>28</sup> Israel, *European Jewry*, 144.

<sup>29</sup> Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers*, 3.

<sup>30</sup> Karp, *The Politics of Jewish Commerce*, 16.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-11.

<sup>32</sup> Diaz, "Prolusione", 19.



failure of its mercantilist aspirations.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, the reforms promoted by the two eighteenth-century rulers of the Lorraine house – Francis Stephen, who ruled between 1737 and 1765, the period known as *Reggenza* (i.e., Regency, as a network of ministers and collaborators governed on behalf of the absentee Grand Duke, who remained in Vienna), and his son Peter Leopold of Habsburg-Lorraine (ruled 1765-1790) – strove to incorporate the port and its now fully developed city into the broader context of the Grand Duchy in an attempt to apply homogeneous policies to the entire state and gradually curb particularistic interests.<sup>34</sup> The privileges granted to the *nazione ebrea*, however, were never abolished and Jewish commercial utility was neither doubted nor questioned.

As soon as the Prince of Craon, appointed regent by Francis Stephen, took possession of the Grand Duchy in July 1737, he wrote the Governor of Livorno reiterating his commitment to foster commerce and to protect all his subjects without distinctions, and he confirmed all privileges granted to the Jews by the *Livornina* of Ferdinand I de' Medici.<sup>35</sup> As an international hub the Livornese port entered a season of decline in the wake of the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1747).<sup>36</sup> It did not take long for Grand Duke Francis Stephen to assess the situation, a realization bolstered also by the doctrine of physiocracy, which posited, against mercantilism, that the source of a nation's wealth rested in agricultural labor.<sup>37</sup> This notwithstanding, the international and "cosmopolitan" nature of the city was not diminished and Jewish privileges were routinely reaffirmed.

In fact, whenever the authorities were called upon to legislate on matters concerning the *nazione ebrea*, Lorraine governmental memoranda customarily reiterated the economic usefulness of the Livornese Jewish community and their long-standing prerogatives in the port.<sup>38</sup> In the

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 21-23 Fetta, "Livourne", 186-187. On the decline of Tuscany during the last decades of the Medici government see Diaz, *I Medici*, 466-545.

<sup>34</sup> On the *Reggenza* see Furio Diaz, "La Reggenza", in Furio Diaz, Luigi Mascilli Migliorini, Carlo Mangio, *Il Granducato di Toscana. I Lorena dalla Reggenza agli anni rivoluzionari*, (Turin: UTET, 1997), 3-245. On Peter Leopold, later Emperor Leopold II, see the classic work by Adam Wandruszka, *Leopold II. Erzherzog von Österreich, Grossherzog von Toskana, König von Ungarn und Böhmen, Römischer Kaiser*, 2 vols. (Wien: Verlag Herold, 1963-65); Luigi Mascilli Migliorini, "L'età delle riforme", in Diaz, Mascilli Migliorini, Mangio, *I Lorena*, 249-421.

<sup>35</sup> Lattes and Toaff, *Gli studi ebraici a Livorno*, 23.

<sup>36</sup> Diaz, "La Reggenza", 58, 108-118.

<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth Fox Genovese, *The Origins of Physiocracy. Economic Revolution and Social Order in Eighteenth-Century France*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976); for a study of Tuscan political economy, see Till Wahnbaeck, *Luxury and Public Happiness. Political Economy in the Italian Enlightenment*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 71-135.

<sup>38</sup> Important excerpts of governmental discussion of the legal status of the *nazione ebrea* in 1752 and 1772 can be found in Mangio, "Nazioni e tolleranza", 12.

1750s, at a time of general economic decline marked by the Tuscan government's desire for structural economic reforms, the notion of Jewish utility appeared prominently also in Livornese public discourse. As Tuscan economic thinkers started focusing their attention increasingly on agriculture, land reform, and the export of agricultural produce,<sup>39</sup> Livornese journals defended commerce in general and the port's economic specificities.

The two main Livornese periodicals of the middle of the eighteenth century, the *Magazzino Italiano* (1752-1754) and the *Magazzino Toscano* (1754-1757), modeled after English examples and aimed at a non-specialist public of merchants,<sup>40</sup> co-opted the figure of the Jewish merchant to bolster their argumentations in favor of trade. In the third volume of the *Magazzino Italiano*, a short note about the Purim celebrations in Livorno referred to the *nazione ebrea* as “meritorious... both because it promotes and increases trade and because it brings benefits to the common people by creating jobs.”<sup>41</sup> In the same volume, readers could also find a praise of commerce commending all trading “nations,” portrayed as bringing happiness and wealth to all layers of society.<sup>42</sup>

These positive comments about the Jewish presence in the port city exemplify a Livornese variant of the late “mercantile philosemitism,” in Jonathan Karp's words, which characterized the 1750s in England, France, and the German lands. During this decade, authors as different as Josiah Tucker (1713-1799), Dean of Gloucester, the French adventurer Ange Goudar (1708- ca. 1791), and the Berlin early *maskil* Aaron Salomon Gumpertz (1723-1769), in collaboration with playwright Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781),<sup>43</sup> expressed favorable sentiments toward the Jews, inviting toleration of this minority precisely in light of its recognized economic usefulness.<sup>44</sup> Clearly influenced by arguments first promoted by the seventeenth-century Jewish apologists

---

<sup>39</sup> Wahnbaeck, *Luxury and Public Happiness*, 83-88, 92.

<sup>40</sup> On the Livornese periodical press see Elena Gremigni, “Periodici e almanacchi livornesi secoli XVII-XVIII”, *Quaderni della Labronica* 69 (1996) and Giuseppe Ricuperati, “Giornali e società nell'Italia dell'Ancien Régime (1668-1789)”, in *La stampa italiana dal Cinquecento all'Ottocento*, eds. Carlo Capra, Valerio Castronovo, Giuseppe Ricuperati, (Bari: Laterza, 1976), 296.

<sup>41</sup> *Magazzino Italiano*, vol. 3, March 25, 1753, 9: “benemerita... sì per il Commercio, che promuove, ed accresce, sì per gli vantaggi che reca al minuto Popolo per mezzo del lavoro.”

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 52-53.

<sup>43</sup> Gad Freudenthal, “Aaron Salomon Gumpertz, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, and the First Call for an Improvement of the Civil Rights of Jews in Germany (1753)”, *AJS Review* 29 (2005): 299-353.

<sup>44</sup> Karp, *The Politics of Jewish Commerce*, 91-93. For a recent diachronic approach to the theme of philosemitism see *Philosemitism in History*, eds. Jonathan Karp, Adam Sutcliffe, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Simone Luzzatto and Menasseh ben Israel, and echoed at the beginning of the eighteenth century by Joseph Addison in *The Spectator* (1712)<sup>45</sup> and by John Toland in his *Reasons for Naturalizing the Jews in Great Britain and Ireland* (1714), these pro-Jewish views did not, however, last long after the 1750s.

In central and western Europe, critical voices emerged in the second half of the eighteenth century, focusing their anxiety primarily on Ashkenazi Jews.<sup>46</sup> These critics did not view “Jewish commerce” in positive terms, but rather depicted Jewish prominence in trade as distorted, a historical accident in need of transformation.<sup>47</sup> Starting with the publication of Christian Wilhelm Dohm’s essay *On the Civil Improvement of the Jews* in 1781, and the promulgation of the Josephinian *Toleranzpatent* the following year, Jews were encouraged, by both Jewish and non-Jewish critics, to give up older modes of life stifled by centuries of restrictions and persecutions, and expected to reform their moral, physical, and above all economic condition before they could receive the same rights enjoyed by non-Jews, and fully become “happy and useful” subjects of the state.<sup>48</sup> A similar profound distaste for Jewish economic activities appears in the entry that abbé Henri Grégoire submitted to the essay contest devised by the *Société Royale des Sciences et des Artes* in Metz in 1785, on the subject of how to make the Jews more useful and happy in France.<sup>49</sup>

For non-Jewish observers such as the Prussian civil servant Dohm or the abbé Grégoire, the historically determined Jewish concentration in commerce was one of the primary causes of the degeneration of the Jewish people. If their sorry state were to change, the state should allow them to pursue activities such as crafts, manufactures, and above all agriculture.<sup>50</sup> The proponents of the *Haskalah* in Prussia, such as Isaac Euchel quoted at the beginning, fully subscribed to this notion of Jewish

---

<sup>45</sup>In *The Spectator* 495 (September 27, 1712), Addison likened the Jews to “the Pegs and Nails in a Great Building, which, although they are but very little valued in themselves, are absolutely necessary to keep the whole Frame together.” This analogy was later on echoed by the *Encyclopédie*, 9 (1765), 24-25 (*s.v. Juif*) and reiterated by Jewish apologists such as Israel Bernard de Valabrègue of Bordeaux in his *Réflexions d’un Milord* (1767): Ronald Schechter, *Obstinate Hebrews. Representations of Jews in France, 1715-1815*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 115-119.

<sup>46</sup>These calls for Jews to abandon commerce and take up crafts and manufacture did not originate in the eighteenth century. Martin Luther advocated for this change in his *On the Jews and Their Lies* (1543), and so did exponents of German Pietism in the following century, see Karp, *The Politics of Jewish Commerce*, 110-111.

<sup>47</sup>Karp, *The Politics of Jewish Commerce*, 93.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 94-106.

<sup>49</sup>Schechter, *Obstinate Hebrews*, 87-95. See also Alissa Goldstein Sepinwall, “L’Abbé Grégoire and the Metz Contest: The View from New Documents”, *Revue des études juives* 166 (2007): 243-258.

<sup>50</sup>Karp, *The Politics of Jewish Commerce*, 112-122, 132-134.

self-regeneration, pointing to Italian, and in particular Livornese, Jews as the ideal embodiment of the much-needed Jewish improvement.<sup>51</sup> Ironically, however, this kind of reformist ideology, posited on the notion that Jews were in need of amelioration and should, among other things, busy themselves with economic occupations other than trade, did not strike any roots in Livorno itself – nor in other parts of Italy with strong Jewish mercantile communities.<sup>52</sup> Rather, the commercial success of the Livornese Jewish community provided ample proof of its social utility to the government, not of the Jews' degeneration. This factor led the Tuscan government to continue promoting Jewish traditional economic occupations in Livorno (their extensive engagement with trade) in the second half of the eighteenth century, rather than subject them to criticism.

Francis Stephen's son Peter Leopold, one of the main proponents of Enlightened Absolutism among eighteenth-century princes, complemented attempts to turn Livorno into a center for the export of Tuscan grain with further initiatives to confirm its status of neutrality and to strengthen commercial networks with North Africa and the Levant.<sup>53</sup> Although he simplified and dismantled corporate liberties in the rest of the Grand Duchy in the 1770s and 1780s, including Christian confraternities and professional associations (*arti*), Peter Leopold endeavored to accommodate specific Livornese privileges to the principles of free market economy that his government propounded.<sup>54</sup> As for the *nazione ebraica*, Peter Leopold's rule once again upheld its prerogatives rooted in older mercantilist and protectionist principles, even as he sought through his reforms to abolish those very principles in the broader Tuscan society.

In light of the above, it is possible to advance the following suggestion. Throughout the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth century, Livornese Jews had enjoyed benefits unparalleled in any other Italian center and represented an avant-garde example of successful Jewish resettlement in Western Europe. When new economic and political trends challenged mercantilism, the broader framework that had allowed for the growth and flourishing of the Livornese Jewish community, the corporate *nazione ebraica's* continued existence was guaranteed, as its

---

<sup>51</sup>The Alsatian Jewish leader Berr-Isaac Berr, writing after the French Revolution, also advocated a shift from commerce to manufacture and agriculture: Lawrence Scott Lerner, "Beyond Grégoire. A Third Discourse of Jews and the French", *Modern Judaism* 21 (2001), 199-215: 202-205.

<sup>52</sup>For the case of Modena, where the *Haskalah* message of Jewish amelioration did not resonate, see Federica Francesconi, "From Ghetto to Emancipation: The Role of Moisé Formiggini", *Jewish History* 24 (2010): 331-354.

<sup>53</sup> Fettah, "Livourne," 187. In 1778 the free and neutral status of the port was confirmed.

<sup>54</sup> Diaz, "Prolusione", 21-22.

usefulness to the state was not questioned or doubted, but rather emphasized. This situation safeguarded the existing status quo, to the mutual satisfaction of the Livornese authorities and of the conservative oligarchy that governed the Jewish community. At the same time, the deeply engrained “discourse of Jewish commercial utility” did not lead to the development of a discussion on the Jewish condition in Tuscany in the 1780s (the period in which the “Jewish question” was publicly “discovered” in other countries, such as France and Prussia) nor to the formulation of encompassing proposals for a transformation of Jewish status.<sup>55</sup> Rather, it encouraged the permanence of a widespread view of the Jews as a corporate collectivity protected by the continued benevolence of the sovereign.

### **Tuscan Jewish Property-Owners and the Leopoldine Communal Reformist Project**

Starting from the early 1770s, Grand Duke Peter Leopold attempted to rationalize municipal governance as part of an extensive program of administrative reforms, a project in which grand ducal advisor Francesco Maria Gianni (1728-1821) played the most significant role. Gianni championed policies shaped by new ideas of “citizenship” and political participation, informed by seventeenth-century natural law theories, based on the belief that self-interested property-owners would be ideally suited to manage the *res publica* conceived as a business (*azienda*).<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> For a different interpretation of the Jewish condition in Tuscany during the eighteenth century, see Ulrich Wyrwa, *Juden in der Toskana und in Preußen im Vergleich. Aufklärung und Emanzipation in Florenz, Livorno, Berlin und Königsberg i. Pr.* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 43-66; Id. “Berlin and Florence in the Age of Enlightenment: Jewish Experience in Comparative Perspective”, *German History* 21 (2003): 1-28; Id. ““Perché i moderni rabbini pretendono di dare ad intendere una favola chimerica...” L’illuminismo toscano e gli ebrei”, *Quaderni storici* 103 (2000): 139-161. For a discussion of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Italian approaches to the “Jewish question” see Renzo De Felice, “Per una storia del problema ebraico in Italia alla fine del XVIII secolo e all’inizio del XIX”, *Movimento Operaio* 5 (1955): 681-727 and Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, *Il prezzo dell’eguaglianza. Il dibattito sull’emancipazione degli ebrei in Italia 1781-1848*, (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1998).

<sup>56</sup> I use the term citizenship here to refer to the right of political representation enjoyed by a limited number of individuals in a hierarchical Old Regime society of estates and orders. I am not referring to the modern notion of national citizenship that emerges only in the aftermath of the French Revolution, as the institutional articulation of the relationship between equal citizens and the national state that represents them. On theories of citizenship in the pre-modern period, see Pietro Costa, *Civitas. Storia della cittadinanza in Europa. I Dalla civiltà comunale al Settecento*, (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1999) and Id., “Il discorso della cittadinanza in Europa: ipotesi di lettura”, in *Cittadinanza. Individui, diritti sociali, collettività nella storia contemporanea*, ed. Carlotta Sorba, (Rome: Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali, 2002), 12-37.

The reform focused on the nexus between three elements: property-ownership, taxable wealth, and representation. Since all property-owners contributed to the costs of administration through their tax quota, they were viewed as interested political participants and should therefore become candidates eligible for political representation, alongside the members of the Tuscan aristocracy. The names of eligible proprietors who met the required minimum for taxable wealth were to be placed within a bag, from which a group of names (usually three) would be randomly drawn. If selected, they were to sit in the general councils and magistracies of their municipalities, next to nobles and *cittadini*, and cast their ballots to decide questions concerning public administration. The first step of this sweeping reform was limited to local administrations, but a later stage was envisioned in which ownership would become a prerequisite to contribute to state government. The role of the sovereign was also imagined to evolve from that of a protector to that of a mere supervisor of well-regulated and well-administered communities.<sup>57</sup>

This general principle challenged engrained practices of power and aristocratic oligarchies. Gianni's enlightened reformist plan met with varying degrees of opposition all over Tuscany and required several modifications. The same principle, taken to its logical conclusions, was also to be extended to eligible Tuscan Jewish proprietors, whom Gianni viewed as subjects fit to participate in the administration of the *res publica* – just as any other eligible Tuscan property owner.<sup>58</sup> As we will see, however, engrained local interests and governmental concessions to traditional political powers thwarted the revolutionary import of the Tuscan reformist plans to grant “active citizenship” to all Jewish proprietors. In Livorno, in particular, the progress toward active political inclusion experienced by members of the *nazione ebrea* in the late eighteenth century was incomplete and partial at best.

Marcello Verga has astutely pointed out that the Tuscan government's proposal to give Jews political representation in local administrations developed along unique lines that had nothing to do with the ideas underlining the projects for Jewish integration advanced in France and Prussia. Gianni's approach to Jewish proprietors did not stem from a comprehensive plan for Jewish emancipation, but rather developed *ex post facto*, as a reaction to practical questions raised by his ideal project. The results were certainly pioneering and unprecedented. As we have seen, in western and central Europe, Jews were expected first and foremost to change, either by improving their condition or by shedding

---

<sup>57</sup> Bernardo Sordi, *L'amministrazione illuminata. Riforme della comunità e progetti di costituzione nella Toscana leopoldina*, (Milan: Giuffrè, 1991).

<sup>58</sup> Women who owned property were allowed to participate in the elections. If selected, they were required to indicate a male substitute or to decline the appointment after paying a standard fee.

their particularism, in order to become worthy of civic inclusion. In Tuscany, unlike France and Prussia, enlightened administrators ignored discussions on the Jewish condition. Indeed, the principle of “self-interested property ownership,” understood as a “universal” and “natural” basis for active political participation, completely bypassed the beliefs and concerns that informed the debates over Jewish emancipation in France and Prussia during the 1780s.<sup>59</sup>

Based on this principle, it was only logical for Gianni that Jewish property-owners should be included in the business of administration. His proposal did not require a prior radical transformation on the part of the Jews *à la* Dohm or Grégoire. Jewish proprietors were deemed worthy of contributing to local administration because they were subjected to taxation according to their property ownership and therefore deserved to express their interests in the public forum of the municipal administration.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, the Tuscan administrator did not engage with the vexed question of Jewish particularism and autonomy, which was to be a crucial element in the French discussion of Jewish emancipation at the Paris National Assembly. Jewish communal and juridical autonomy did not appear as an obstacle for the application of the principle of property ownership as a basis for political representation. It seems that for Gianni the corporate, autonomous status of the Jews within the Tuscan state could coexist with the possibility for individual Jewish proprietors to hold equal rights of political representation as their non-Jewish counterparts.

### **The *Nazione Ebraica* of Livorno and the Municipal Reforms**

Gianni's ideas were not only innovative, but their import could have been truly revolutionary – in his *Ricordi*, the political advisor remarked that “equality is not a French invention, but exists among us in many parts of our government.”<sup>61</sup> There is however scant evidence concerning

---

<sup>59</sup> Among the rich literature on the French and Prussian debates about Jewish emancipation, see Arthur Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews*, (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1968); Schechter, *Obstinate Hebrews*, 18-109; Ritchie Robertson, *'The Jewish Question' in German Literature, 1749-1939. Emancipation and Its Discontents*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Paolo Bernardini, *La questione ebraica nel tardo illuminismo tedesco. Studi intorno allo 'Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden' di C. W. Dohm (1781)*, (Florence: Giuntina, 1992).

<sup>60</sup> Marcello Verga, “Proprietà e cittadinanza. Ebrei e riforme delle comunità nella Toscana di Pietro Leopoldo”, in *La formazione storica della alterità. Studi sulla storia della tolleranza nell'età moderna offerti a Antonio Rotondò*, eds. Henry Méchoulan, Richard H. Popkin, Giuseppe Ricuperati, Luisa Simonutti, (Florence: Olschki, 2001), vol. 3, 1047-1067: 1048, 1054-1056.

<sup>61</sup> Eric W. Cochrane, *Tradition and Enlightenment in the Tuscan Academies (1690-1800)* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), 53.

the practical application of his reforms to Tuscan Jews. Extant documents point to great differences depending on local circumstances and rooted power hierarchies, showing that the transition from ideal proposal to practical policy proceeded with difficulty. Eligible members of the Jewish communities of Florence and Pisa were the first Tuscan Jews to gain access to political rights as municipal office-holders in 1778; however, there is no trace of their actual political participation. In Siena, Jewish proprietors gained representation in 1786, but for a long time the legislation did not find concrete application.<sup>62</sup> In smaller centers of the Tuscan countryside, Jewish proprietors fared better. The Jews of Monte San Savino, it would seem, were elected to offices.<sup>63</sup> Recent research has also shown that the Jewish property owners of the village of Pitigliano did regularly participate in its municipal council.<sup>64</sup>

When it came to the practical application of Gianni's tolerant values in Livorno, where the *Livornina* granted Jews the right to buy real estate and there existed a large number of small and medium Jewish house-owners, alongside a few prominent Jewish proprietors,<sup>65</sup> protracted negotiations led to a final policy that reflected prejudice and fear against the Jews, rather than their full acceptance as political actors *qua* proprietors.<sup>66</sup> Livorno was a unique case in Tuscany in that, until the middle of the nineteenth-century, the authorities kept considering the large *nazione ebrea* as a collective, corporate group, whose individual members were denied the possibility to run for office within the municipality.<sup>67</sup> As I have argued elsewhere, the commercial success and privileged status of Livornese Jews may explain the Tuscan government's conservatism when it came to extending political rights to specific segments of Livornese Jewry and resulted in the arrested political emancipation of the *nazione ebrea* in the 1780s.<sup>68</sup>

On July 7, 1778 Peter Leopold asserted that if individual Jewish property-owners of Florence and Pisa were elected, they could sit in the

---

<sup>62</sup> Francesca Piselli, "Giansenisti", ebrei e "giacobini" a Siena. *Dall'Accademia ecclesiastica all'Impero napoleonico (1780-1814)*, (Florence: Olschki, 2007), 99.

<sup>63</sup> Verga, "Proprietà e cittadinanza", 1061-1062.

<sup>64</sup> Davide Mano, "Towards Jewish Emancipation in the Grand-Duchy of Tuscany: the case of Pitigliano through the emblematic figure of David Consiglio", *Italia Judaica: Proceedings of the Jubilee Conference*, forthcoming. I would like to thank Davide Mano for sharing this paper with me before its publication.

<sup>65</sup> On Jewish property-ownership in early modern Livorno see Lucia Frattarelli Fischer, "Proprietà e insediamento ebraici a Livorno dalla fine del cinquecento alla seconda metà del settecento", *Quaderni storici* 54 (1983): 879-896.

<sup>66</sup> Francesca Gavi, "La disputa sull'ingresso del deputato della "Nazione" ebrea nella comunità di Livorno, lettere e memorie", *Nuovi studi livornesi* 3 (1995): 251-271; Verga, "Proprietà e cittadinanza", 1057-1058.

<sup>67</sup> Carlotta Ferrara degli Uberti, *La "Nazione Ebraica" di Livorno dai privilegi all'emancipazione (1814-1860)*, (Florence: Le Monnier, 2007).

<sup>68</sup> Bregoli, "Two Jews walk into a Coffeehouse", 317-323.



general councils of their municipalities.<sup>69</sup> In Livorno, an initial proposal drafted for the municipality in August 1779 was rejected, resulting in prolonged and complicated negotiations between the representatives of the Livornese aristocracy, the central authorities, and the Jewish community. Ultimately, the Tuscan administration promulgated a decision in March 1780 that created a fixed seat for the inclusion of a single Jewish representative into the Livornese municipal government, on behalf of the proprietary interests of the entire *nazione ebrea*, selected by the Grand Duke from a list of eligible candidates submitted by the Jewish lay leaders.<sup>70</sup> The selection of the Jewish representative mirrored the process by which the Tuscan sovereign appointed Jewish lay leaders in Livorno.

In examining the steps that led to the 1780 decision, the different perspectives championed by the representatives of the Livornese noble elite and members of the local government, on the one hand, and by those of the *nazione ebrea*, on the other, should be emphasized. The Livornese aristocracy regarded the *nazione ebrea* as a corporate community, and as such as a body, whose members could not enjoy rights of representation as individual owners of real estate, but were deemed worthy of collective representation through Catholic substitutes. For their part, Livornese Jewish proprietors considered themselves worthy of individual political rights *precisely* because of their utility to the state and their established privileged status as a corporate community, as well as because of their singular importance as property owners in town. In both cases, the innovative notion of property-ownership as the *sole* universal and natural basis for active political representation – Gianni's idea that all property-owners are equal and should therefore hold equal rights and duties, their religious and ethnic identity notwithstanding – was lost on the interested parties.

The initial proposal drafted for the municipality of Livorno in August 1779 had devised a two-tiered system, composed of a higher *magistrato comunitativo* (communal magistracy) and a lower *consiglio generale* (general council) that included sixteen members. Eligibility for the higher public offices was strictly regulated by census and social class, but everybody who owned real estate in the territory of the Commune was eligible for

---

<sup>69</sup> For the text of the Grand Duke's *motuproprio* see Gavi, "La disputa sull'ingresso", 262. The 1778 edict corrected an opposite decision previously issued on December 26, 1774, which prevented Jews from sitting in either the magistracies or the general council.

<sup>70</sup> For a study of the communal reforms in Livorno see Carlo Mangio, "La riforma municipale a Livorno", in *L'ordine di Santo Stefano e la nobiltà toscana nelle riforme municipali settecentesche*, (Pisa: ETS, 1995), 85-120: 92-107. On the admission of a Jewish deputy, see Gavi, "La disputa sull'ingresso". For an English overview of the Livornese reforms, see Dubin, "Subjects into Citizens. Jewish Autonomy and Inclusion in Early Modern Livorno and Trieste", *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook* 5 (2006), 51-81: 65-67; Francesca Bregoli, "Two Jews walk into a Coffeehouse", 319-323.

*imborsazione* (i.e., names of candidates were placed in a bag and randomly selected) for a place in the general council.<sup>71</sup> Jewish property-owners would be included among the eligible candidates, but if their name were selected, they would not be admitted to sit in the councils. Rather, they would be offered the option to appoint a Catholic substitute to represent them, albeit without voting rights, or to refuse the office altogether, with exemption from the monetary penalty usually applied in cases of refusal. Unsatisfied with this initial plan, both the *nazione ebrea* and the representatives of the local Livornese elites, animated by different reasons, came up with correctives.

The primary goal of the Livornese aristocracy was to keep all non-Catholic and small property owners from attaining political rights, fearing that the sizable Jewish community and the petty proprietors (Catholic or not) would take control of the city's administration.<sup>72</sup> Pompeo Baldasseroni and Ferdinando Sproni, deputies of the Livornese noble governing class, recognized that there were among Jewish proprietors "rich and respectable" elements, who could honorably sit in the municipal council, though most of them were "small and miserable property-owners, who are scoundrels in their appearance, sentiments, and works."<sup>73</sup> Yet, the deputies conceded that "such a respectable body of property-owners should have an influence in the administration of those affairs that concern it," suggesting therefore that three Catholic procurators paid by the Jewish community should represent the interests of the entire *nazione ebrea* in the council and the magistracy.<sup>74</sup> If this were to be the case, however, the admission of individual Jewish proprietors to both the general council and the magistracy could not be allowed.

If the *nazione ebrea* "were to be considered as a body," the deputies remarked, and as such enjoy permanent representation, it would be "necessary to take away from individual [Jews] the right to sit" in the municipal organs.<sup>75</sup> Livornese Jews, in their view, could enjoy (indirect) rights of representation only *qua* Jews, that is as members of a protected corporate body – not as human beings in their capacity as proprietors. Baldasseroni's and Sproni's understanding countered the enlightened notion that property-ownership alone was a sufficient, universal, natural condition to access political rights. Their comment reflects well the

---

<sup>71</sup> Gavi, "La disputa sull'ingresso", 252.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 254, 270-271.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 254: "il maggior numero è composto di piccoli e miserabili possessori, che sono canaglia nella figura, nei sentimenti e nelle opere."

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 264: "[I] deputati infrascritti [...] trovano giusto che un corpo di possessori così rispettabile debba avere un [sic] influenza nella amministrazione di quelli affari che lo interessano." The memorandum was dated October 11, 1779.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 264-265: "si rende necessario che venga tolto agl'individui il diritto di poter risiedere tanto in persona che per mezzo di procuratori... perché se vogliono considerarsi come corpo non possono più considerarsi come individui."

traditionally corporatist view of political activity that defined Old Regime societies. Within this tradition, originating in the medieval period, the subject does not enjoy abstract equal rights, but holds a limited set of rights and duties commensurate with his or her position within the political community, conceived as a body (*corpus*).<sup>76</sup>

The observation also evokes the well-known statement to the opposite effect, uttered by Count Clermont-Tonnerre at the French National Assembly nine years later, in December 1789: “One should deny the Jews as a nation everything and grant them everything as individuals; they must not be either a political entity or a caste in the state.”<sup>77</sup> Underlying Clermont-Tonnerre’s sentiment was the belief, widespread among the French revolutionaries intent on destroying the corporatist society of Old Regime France, that Jews should shed their juridical and communal autonomy. If they wanted to enjoy equal rights as French citizens, Jews should renounce any national distinctiveness and assimilate into the new French republican nation.<sup>78</sup>

The comment of the two Livornese aristocrats did not, however, imply that if Livornese Jews shed their particularistic, corporate identity – if the *nazione ebrea* abandoned its status as an autonomous yet integrated body, which protected the interests of its members within a society of bodies – individual Jews would become worthy of equal rights as other proprietors. To the contrary, by pitting corporate collectivity as the conceptual opposite of individual representation, the Livornese aristocrats exploited the traditional understanding of the Jewish minority in town to their advantage, in order to prevent the dreaded risk that individual Jewish proprietors gain political power. Thus, their memorandum reinforced the pre-existing, traditional notion that the *nazione ebrea* could only be treated as a corporate community enjoying special privileges because of its size and economic importance.

For their part, the representatives of the *nazione ebrea*, Jacob Aghib and [Jacob?] Nunes, championed a “mixed” approach to political representation that revealed the coexistence of older and newer worldviews, combining corporatist interests with individualist concerns. Livornese Jews insisted that the 1778 decision that granted representation to elected Jewish individual proprietors in Florence and Pisa, remain valid in Livorno as well. Remarkably, Aghib’s and Nunes’ memorandum advocated the right to Jewish individual representation based on the engrained notion that the *nazione ebrea* enjoyed a privileged,

---

<sup>76</sup> Costa, “Il discorso della cittadinanza”, 30.

<sup>77</sup> Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews*, 360.

<sup>78</sup> When the French National Assembly emancipated the Jews of France in September 1791, the revolutionaries gave concrete affirmation to the principle proposed by Clermont-Tonnerre two years earlier. With the emancipation of individual Jews as equal French citizens came the unavoidable end of Jewish communal autonomy.

unique status in the entire Tuscan state: “[B]ecause of the [higher] number of its members and its much wider commerce the Livornese *Nazione* has always deserved the sovereign’s benefits and privileges more than the other [Jewish communities] of the Grand Duchy.” Therefore, Livornese Jewry should not be discriminated against and treated less favorably than the smaller and less prosperous communities of Florence and Pisa, where Jewish proprietors enjoyed (at least, in theory) the right to individual political representation.<sup>79</sup> Thus, Aghib and Nunes, proceeding from a corporatist understanding of rights and obligations very similar to that of Baldasseroni and Sproni, came to the opposite conclusion. In their view, the protection that the Livornese *nazione ebraica* enjoyed in Tuscany as a privileged corporate body should be reason enough for the Tuscan government to extend equal rights to its individual members *qua* property owners. In attempting to achieve individual political representation in the municipal council by reminding the Grand Duke of Jewish special privileges, Aghib and Nunes exemplify the fact that toward the end of the Old Regime various understandings of political participation could coexist without being necessarily perceived as contradictory.<sup>80</sup> This combination of concepts that may seem conflicting to us, heirs to the legal turning point of the French Revolution, demonstrates the presence of multiple ways of thinking at that time of transition.<sup>81</sup>

In many respects, this Livornese case lends itself to comparison with late eighteenth-century France, right before and during the revolutionary period. Ronald Schechter has argued that in 1789 learned representatives of both French Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews advanced their plea for active citizenship before the Paris National Assembly not only on the basis of the “universal rights of man,” but also of historical corporatist privileges that they had obtained in the previous centuries thanks to their recognized useful services to the state.<sup>82</sup> By wishing to be “included *as Jews* in the otherwise indivisible French nation,” Sephardi and Ashkenazi representatives, despite different motivations, all championed an apparently paradoxical argument, precariously poised between the discourse of universal, abstract *rights* and that of historically determined *privileges*.<sup>83</sup> Similarly to the Jewish pleas in revolutionary France nine years

---

<sup>79</sup> Gavi, “La disputa sull’ingresso”, 266; Dubin, “Subjects into Citizens”, 65.

<sup>80</sup> On the coexistence of multiple views of “citizenship” and political participation in the early modern period, see Costa, *Civitas* I, 73-80.

<sup>81</sup> On the turning point constituted by the French Revolution, where the medieval corporatist tradition of civic politics met with the tradition of unalienable, abstract, individual rights championed by seventeenth-century natural law theories, see Costa, “Il discorso della cittadinanza”, 31; Id. *Civitas, Storia della cittadinanza in Europa. Il L’età delle rivoluzioni (1789-1848)*, (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2000), 5-94.

<sup>82</sup> Schechter, *Obstinate Hebrews*, 165-178.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 165, 169. This very paradox was at the core of the revolutionary discourse itself.

later, Aghib and Nunes combined the older, absolutist notions of their utility to the ruler, and the ruler's resulting protection of their prerogatives, with a budding discourse of abstract rights that implied a changing understanding of the Jewish role vis-à-vis the political order. In the *nazione ebrea's* memorandum, the discourse of Jewish economic utility coexisted dialectically with the discourse of property-ownership as condition for equal political rights.

The comparison with late eighteenth-century France can be extended even further when we consider the issue of Jewish communal autonomy, closely related to the preceding observations. Frances Malino has shown that in pre-revolutionary France, like Tuscany a hierarchical society of bodies and privileges, there existed a multiplicity of views relative to the continuation of Jewish autonomy vis-à-vis their civil inclusion. Claude-Antoine Thiery, a Protestant lawyer who submitted one of the winning entries in the 1785 Metz essay contest, advocated the retention of Jewish communal autonomy for the sake of stability and continued order. While Thiery was unique among French non-Jewish observers in advancing this claim, neither Sephardi nor Ashkenazi spokesmen who reacted to the 1787 Malesherbes edict, which recognized Christian non-Catholic minorities in France but prohibited them from forming a "group, community, or particular society" within the French kingdom, saw Jewish communal autonomy as incompatible with the acquisition of citizenship rights.<sup>84</sup> The attitudes toward the retention of Jewish communal autonomy changed only after the French Revolution identified nationality with citizenship, eliminating for the Jews the possibility of retaining their ancient juridical and communal autonomy. Similarly, in eighteenth-century Tuscany, Livornese Jews conceived of and desired active civic engagement beyond their *nazione*, in the broader municipal sphere, while remaining solidly inscribed within the community's boundaries.

Beside emphasizing traditional *topoi* such as community size, commercial activity, and long-standing privileges, the memorandum that Aghib and Nunes sent the Grand Duke demonstrated a keen understanding of, and support for, the burgeoning concept of political participation based on self-interest and property-ownership. Livornese Jews posited that the presence of individual Jews in the new magistracies was necessary, because the *nazione ebrea* owned not only a sizable quantity of buildings in the countryside, but more than one-quarter of the city's real estate and "except for public buildings, it own[ed] certainly more real estate than all

---

<sup>84</sup> Frances Malino, "Attitudes toward Jewish Communal Autonomy in Prerevolutionary France", in *Essays in Modern Jewish History. A Tribute to Ben Halpern*, eds. Phyllis Cohen Albert, Frances Malino, (Rutherford, Madison and Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1981), 95-117: 111-113.

other Livornese and foreign nationals together.”<sup>85</sup> Excluding Jews from voting in support of their own interests in town, thus, would mean to place them “under the perpetual care and government of the Livornese nationals and other property-owners,” tantamount to “a great prejudice to its own interest,” as well as “a cause of great dishonor.” Such a decision, the memorandum concluded, was absolutely contrary to the intentions and spirit of the new communal regulations if the Commune, conceptualized as a business, was to be administered by accountable individuals representing their interests. Since the proprietary interests of Livornese Jews were the most important issue at hand, nevertheless, they were willing to come to a compromise – either by replacing elected individual Jews with eligible candidates who held governing positions within the Jewish community (and were therefore well-known to the Grand Duke and of proven distinction), or by at least guaranteeing a yearly fixed seat in the *Magistrato* for a Jewish representative approved by the government, with full voting rights.<sup>86</sup>

The Jewish request for individual representation was rejected by a governmental resolution issued on March 20, 1780, which instead adapted restrictively one of the suggestions put forward by Aghib and Nunes. Limited Jewish representation was guaranteed in Livorno in the form of one deputy sitting in the general council of the municipality (not in the *Magistrato*), selected by the Grand Duke among ten names submitted by the Jewish lay leaders.<sup>87</sup> This conclusion strongly reinforced the notion of Livornese Jewry as a separate corporate entity. In contrast to Florentine or Pisan Jews, the Tuscan authorities decided to continue regarding Livornese Jews as a collective body and to keep relying on its oligarchic ruling class, even as Peter Leopold and his advisors attempted to dismantle the privileges of other corporate groups, such as professional associations and charitable confraternities. The final decision officially recognized the importance of Livornese property-ownership by guaranteeing a constant Jewish presence in the communal administration: in force of their strong presence in town as proprietors, the Jews *as a community* gained what could be called a “group right” for one of its members. At the same time, the Tuscan authorities allayed the fears of the old Livornese aristocracy by severely confining and controlling the extent of Jewish political participation.

Nine years later, with a *motu proprio* issued on April 20, 1789, Peter Leopold rendered non-Catholics and Jews politically equal to all other subjects in Tuscany, allowing them to hold municipal office. The Livornese case, nevertheless, proved yet again exceptional: the special regulation of March 1780 was reiterated, and remained valid with no

---

<sup>85</sup> Gavi, “La disputa sull’ingresso”, 267.

<sup>86</sup> Gavi, “La disputa sull’ingresso”, 269.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 257.

modifications. Thus, while in the rest of the Grand Duchy individual Jews could gain access to existing municipal offices, in Livorno they could only rely on their single national representative chosen by the Grand Duke. This discriminatory situation persisted (with minimal variations introduced in 1845) until Tuscany was annexed to the Kingdom of Italy in 1859.<sup>88</sup>

## Conclusion

Why were the members of the largest, wealthiest and most prominent Jewish community not only in the Tuscan state, but in the entire Italian Peninsula, excluded from holding individual political office in 1780 and then again in 1789? Clearly, the fact that Livornese Jews owned a great deal of real property in town was considered enough of a threat to the engrained political prerogatives of the local Catholic governing class. The Livornese case suggests a deep disconnect between Jewish expectations and non-Jewish anxieties regarding Jewish active political participation. The *nazione ebrea* expected that its significant size, vast property holdings, and commercial success would grant eligible individual owners access to political participation. The local Christian elite feared precisely the consequences of allowing a large, deeply rooted, and reputedly powerful non-Catholic group into the seats of municipal power.

The reasons why the central Tuscan authorities supported the Livornese aristocracy against the appeal of the *nazione ebrea* should be located in engrained practices of political pragmatism. A plausible explanation for the 1780 and 1789 governmental decisions is that the notion of Livornese Jewry's commercial utility, encapsulated in the *Livornina* in 1591 and routinely reiterated in administrative memoranda over the course of almost two hundred years, reinforced the government's inclination to preserve the corporate status of the community out of concerns for social, economical, and political stability. As a result of the port's extraordinary history, the new "equalizing" notions of citizenship and political participation based solely on property-ownership that Gianni propounded and that were applicable to the rest of the Tuscan state, could not be relevant in Livorno.

In conclusion, it can be suggested that during the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth century the emphasis on its utility and economic worth gave the *nazione ebrea* a distinct standing among other

---

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 251. The Grand Duke Leopold II promulgated a new constitution (*statuto*) in 1848, guaranteeing the legal and political emancipation of all Tuscan Jews, which was however abolished in 1852. On the legal status of Jews in nineteenth-century Tuscany see also the classic work by Isacco Rignano, *Sulla attuale posizione giuridica degli israeliti in Toscana. Brevi cenni*, (Florence: Tipografia di Mariano Cecchi, 1847).

Jewish communities. These privileges, nonetheless, failed to translate into greater political rights in the 1780s, the decade when many European governments began considering in earnest how to include legally and politically their Jewish subjects, when the political opportunities of Livornese Jews fell behind those of smaller, less conspicuous, and less emblematic Jewish communities. The retention of the old corporate privileges, thus, prevented Livornese Jews from experiencing the smooth process of political integration that historians have generally associated with Jews of Sephardi or Italian origin, who during the eighteenth century lived and thrived in commerce-oriented cities on the Mediterranean or the Atlantic seaboard.<sup>89</sup>

The port of Livorno was a successful example of mercantilist policy at work, from which its Jewish community reaped great benefits in the early modern period. Similarly to other Jews living in Mediterranean ports, the Atlantic seaboard, or the New World, the *nazione ebrea* had been granted special prerogatives on the grounds of its economic usefulness, gaining liberties that most Jewish communities elsewhere could only envy in the course of the seventeenth century. At the onset of “modernity,” however, its privileged status as a mercantile community turned out to be a force for conservatism that, while preserving time-honored structures and norms, prevented the full application of reforming and equalizing policies.

---

**Francesca Bregoli** is Assistant Professor of History and the Joseph and Oro Halegua Professor of Greek and Sephardic Jewish Studies at Queens College of the City University of New York. She received a PhD from the University of Pennsylvania and a MA from the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Her work concentrates on Sephardi and Italian Jewish history in the early modern period, with a particular interest in Enlightenment culture, sociability, and the history of the book. She is currently revising a manuscript on Jewish integration in the eighteenth-century port-city of Livorno, dealing with the themes of acculturation, privilege, and social segregation.

**How to quote this article:**

Francesca Bregoli, *The Port of Livorno and its "Nazione Ebraica" in the Eighteenth Century: Economic Utility and Political Reforms*, in “Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC”, N.2 October 2011  
*url*: [www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=227](http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=227)

---

<sup>89</sup> See especially David Sorkin, “The Port Jew: Notes toward a Social Type”, *Journal of Jewish Studies* 50 (1999): 87-97; Id., “Port Jews and the Three Regions of Emancipation”, *Jewish Culture and History* 4 (2001): 31-46.